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ABSTRACT

This examination of the past and present states of collection development in the research library covers background information, theories, and associated problems. A historical review of methods that have been and are currently being used for collection development includes discussions of the changes imposed by World War II on the practice of university faculty guiding collection development; the shifting of research patterns from traditional academic and retrospective research to use of very current information and scholarship with practical utility; problems resulting from federal funding cutbacks in the 1970s and the escalating price of library materials (especially in the heavily funded research areas of science and engineering); important factors for librarians--who are now primarily responsible for collection development--to consider in formulating a collection development policy; the development of library networks; the current question of library versus faculty-controlled selection; and possible solutions to the problems of library-controlled collection development. A 13-item bibliography is included. (THC)

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Research Libraries and Collection Development: Background, Methods, and Perspectives

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Research Libraries and Collection Development:
Background, Methods, and Perspectives

Organization and research aside, collection development in research libraries is only a fledgling enterprise in the long history of libraries. Moreover, it is a difficult activity to define and even more difficult to objectify. This paper is an attempt to examine the past and present states of collection development in the research library. In order to arrive at a basic understanding, some historical background is necessary. This preview will shed light on the two different methods that are currently being used and discussed for collection development in research libraries. The problems and conflicts of those methods, and some perspective on the nature and future of research library collection development would be in order. It is worth noting that this investigation began as a look at research as a factor in building collections. It was apparent, however, that we as librarians have only begun to look closely at various factors, so the topic was the broader (and better) one, addressing the background, theories, and problems of the research library and development of the collection. It is hoped that some new or rediscovered perspective will emerge from this investigation and perhaps point out areas of need in our understanding.

The issue facing research libraries is how can

> a single library which aspires to anticipate and supply, on demand, a high percentage of materials for the range and breadth of interests found in a typical university research library, exercise a high degree of selectivity.[1]

This quote from Elaine Sloan illustrates weel the present situation of research libraries. The problem has not always been as it is, however. Unique factors have placed research libraries in the present situation. Charles B. Osburn's book, Academic Research and Library Resources, contains an excellent analysis of the beginnings, growth, and shifts in research, and in turn, the correspondent changes in research libraries. It is upon his book that I will rely most for background.

It is commonly known that before World War II, libraries depended very heavily on the faculty of the university for guidance in selecting and developing the collection. Research libraries generally lacked formal selection policies, but there were two principles guiding the process: reflecting the universality of knowledge and the idea that anything is potentially valuable research material, especially historical material.[2] Prosperity, a boom in the student population, and most importantly, a dramatic rise in government-sponsored research fit nicely into such a framework. But---

> When the federal government seized upon the idea of contracting with universities for much-needed scientific and technological research during the war crisis, it established both a structure for and levels of funding for academic research that were innovative ... These events had a profound impact on the methods employed by academic researchers to the extent that new national patterns have become manifest.[3]

The national patterns in research shifted use of research libraries from traditional academic and retrospective research,

to use of very current information (especially in science) and scholarship with some practical utility.[4] Thus the emphasis in collection development in those libraries changed to meet new needs. The boom in scholarship, resources, publication, and the money to buy them complimented the established notions of completeness and universality through the 1960's.[5] The response of libraries was to staff subject specialists in order to handle the volume of material the library was able to purchase,[6] and perhaps a chief bibliographer to coordinate the operation. While this abundance of demand, materials, and money continued, the faculty in a new "publish or perish" environment took less time and interest in developing the library collection. Nor were they hired for that purpose.[7] So the responsibility for collection development soon shifted to those new bibliographers and subject specialists.

The 1970's ushered in the problems now faced by research libraries. Federal funding for research, which initiated the original shift, was cut back, and only later would research stabilize. Concurrently, the price of library materials, especially the heavily funded research areas of science and engineering, rose dramatically.[8] Average prices almost tripled for books and periodicals; and funds were shifted away from certain subject areas in order to maintain buying levels in others.[9] The situation changed quite drastically and quickly, and one can see from whence the problem came in the presentation at the beginning of this section. Given the demands on, and expectations of, research libraries, which have not reverted back with the shrinking funding, how can one apply the new

concept of selectivity and still meet research needs? The response to this has been twofold. Research libraries developed the new area of collection development and have attempted to systemize the selection process. There also is the older, and still useful practice of faculty selection, which is advocated sometimes as a more efficient and effective way to choose library materials, perhaps especially in the research library.

Given the demands, both research and budgetary, it was necessary for library controlled collection development to formulate tools and concepts to more effectively spend the library budget. What follows is a selection and description of those practices that are germane to our subject.

From the outset, one must realize that the research library exists to serve the university and faculty and their needs. Those needs must be assesed and from them must come a formal collection development policy. The key to formulating one is faculty and administrative input to clearly define the institution's strengths and goals.[10] It is vital to determine the university's research and curriculum emphasis. To this the library representative(s) must bring a knowledge of the present collection in order to assess what the library will need in relationship to university goals.[11] From this basis it is then possible to begin writing the policy. It has been suggested that the most useful policy to an institution is one that is both comprehensive and detailed.[12] This then should be broken down into individual selection policies for subject areas, and then, based upon goals and objectives, assigned

restrictions and/or levels of collection.[13] This can easily be revised, as needed, by sections if and when emphasis shifts in the university. The policy then helps in the ever-present justification of expenditures and establishes priorities of buying.[14]

Since the responsibility for collection development has become the domain of librarians, there must be several kinds of knowledge in formulating the selection policy that the librarian should bring to bear on the process. First of all, the librarian should bring some knowledge and discernment in analyzing research strengths and goals of the university. Secondly, as mentioned, he or she must bring some knowledge of the libraries' present holdings. This can be achieved through collection evaluation. The methodology is varied, but a choice of which are to be used must be made between those available.[15] However, when some satisfactory judgement is arrived at, this knowledge can influence selection policy, especially the choices to strengthen or specialize in certain areas, and again to add clout to budget requests.[16]

Another assessment to arrive at the same purposes is to look at use of the research library. The most recent, comprehensive, and noteworthy attempt has been the study of the use of the research facilities at the University of Pittsburgh[17] it is valuable to note that the results of that seven-year circulation study showed that 40% of the books purchased did not circulate.[18] Criticisms of the study suggest that circulation may not be the whole story. For instance, surveys and weeding out of available materials would not show up in

circulation, but would be used nontheless.[19] In terms of justifying and forming the library's collection development policy one must also look to shifts in future interests and the nature of the collection, from secondary to primary source.[20] The nature of the research library has also included the idea that the collection is a resource waiting to be mined for scholarly work. Other studies may be added to the Pittsburgh study in order to round out our understanding, but the methods of arriving at some notion of library holdings and use can be critical to setting up guidelines for selection policy. Finally, one of the most recent developments has been library networks. Coordination of collection development is one of their possible functions in order to eliminate wasteful duplication and allow concentration in areas of special strength while providing access to other resources in cooperative libraries.

From the standpoint of library control of collection development it is necessary to get the input of faculty and administration in order to arrive at some guiding policy for book selection. That policy is the primary tool of library selection, and many factors influence its ultimate nature. There is another approach which avoids this lengthy process, and is deemed by some to be superior in efficiency and effectiveness. Faculty selection has a long history, and it has never been totally excluded in the collection development process. There have been some recent suggestions that primary responsibility for book selection to be returned to the faculty, including research collections.

In a very controversial article it was suggested that some collections would be better as a result of the shift back to faculty selection.[21] Since the 29th century, when the German university model was imported almost whole, faculty were the book selectors just as in the German institutions.[22] This continued into the 1900's, where, for reasons already discussed, the library began to take control of selections. The assumption until then was that faculty were better qualified because of more intimate subject knowledge. This was an unquestioned operating principle. This is evidenced by Wilson and Taubers' comment in a 1956 edition of The University Library:

> The library committee ... is generally of an advisory, rather than administrative nature. Members of the faculty are usually charged with the responsibility for selecting materials in support of courses and programs of research.[23]

The only later hint at the change to come:

> The assumption that the faculty is more competent than the library staff to select materials for the support of instruction and research may well be examined.[24]

The current base for faculty selection relies on those same assumptions. The demands upon libraries are not perceived as being met, and so it is only logical to return the choice of materials back to those who can at least do as well or better through superior knowledge of their disciplines.

> Simply put, faculty members have been socialized into their disciplines and can, therefore, make collection development decisions based upon information not available to most librarians.[25]

Given the assumption that faculty would be promoted, hired, and held accountable for their choices like librarians, there would be little threat to the long-term effects of

faculty selection on research collection. Since there are only subjective evaluations of those collections, cross comparisons are not always legitimate. Finally, balance in a library collection is perhaps a concept we can no longer afford without sacrificing the depth of other areas.[26] In other words, if it can be worked into the faculty's job description, there is no logical reason for not having faculty selection, and putting the savings in staff reductions at the library into the book budget![27]

The methods of collection development that have been presented are only models. In practice the two are never that distinct, and the question is usually one of dominance rather than exclusivity. There are problems with each of these methods and this last section is an attempt to assess them, and to offer some perspective on fruitful avenues to improve collection development in research libraries.

Turning to the first method examined, one could surmise that there are many factors to be weighed in putting together a collection development policy in a research library. Each of the methods and areas presented could be problematical, and thus deserves some further investigation. First and foremost is the need for faculty involvement. In theory this sounds relatively simple; in practice, political, personal, and even professional hurdles often stand in the way.

Departments or college divisions in a university seldom achieve unity and cooperation in a project, even if it is to further their interests in the library's development. Faculty members are not likely to place a high priority upon this

duty, especially at an institution with a large research emphasis. Stated simply, the professional environment at such a school may not include such a service-oriented attitude in the faculty. The job of faculty liasion in subject areas is thus to extract valuable information and suggestions from faculty who are busy with more pressing responsibilities. That liason then must be both knowledgeable in the subject(s) and skilled in representing the library's interest to the faculty.

Another problem (and one I feel is neglected in the literature), is the inclusion of university leadership in determining the direction and goals of the school, thus influencing the kind of research that needs to be covered in the library's resources. Again one is dealing with busy schedules and perhaps a certain political hesitation to commit to a position, but the information from department chairmen, deans, etc., is invaluable in decisions to allocate materials and funds for the collection.

Evaluating the present collection presents another complexity. Methods range from the standard bibliography checks, numerical counts, faculty evaluations and citation analysis checks in current research. Whatever is included, the decision is ultimately a subjective one, and even some of the methods are themselves subjective. Despite this, valuable information can come out of these checks, and the information must be combined, then given some rank in priorities before one can introduce the results into a collection development policy to shape future purchasing.

Some further consideration must also be given to the use of the collection. As we have seen, there may be some justification to the criticism that libraries are not meeting the needs of a university, this would be supported by the Pittsburgh study of use of the research library. However incomplete the knowledge generated by that study, 40% non-circulation in seven years is a shocking figure. In assessing and shaping collection development one must face this and strike some balanced position between preservation and up-to-the-minute research. The effectiveness of one's purchasing can be partly measured by use, and this should be represented in the selection policy. The long-term value and depth of the collection should also be considered. The balance that is struck must be, and can only be a judgement. The long-term failure or success of the library is the final test of the decision.

Finally the point must be stressed that the accomplishment of faculty and administrative input, evaluation of the collection and its use are all difficult to accomplish and synthesize. Any one or several aspects, or even complete steps may be left out. The coordination and time involved is huge, but it is necessary to weigh as many of the considerations as possible. After all, the library is controlling the nature and amount of resources available for research, and this in turn affects university success in research.

One large problem would be the use of money to buy everything and skip the selective tools. This would create space problems, and it is obvious that no institution has that kind of financial backing. The other problem is simply ignoring or slighting some subject areas in order to collect in some others.

in sum, the organizational, political, and institutional barriers to library-controlled collection development are many. A thorough job is still only an intelligent opinion, and money or unbalanced purchasing are quick and easy remedies in the short run for the research collection purchases.

A solution to the problems of library-controlled collection development is to return control or at least a large say to the faculty. This has been presented as the most logical choice, but it also is not without problems. First among these is the need to coordinate purchases in light of the present collection and other university programs. The library exists to serve an entire institution and all its programs, including an undergraduate school. What faculty or cadre of library representatives could or would undertake the necessary studies and cooperation to adequately buy for the whole university? Furthermore, faculty themselves do not necessarily buy adequate materials. David Stam cited some evidence of this in his reply to the Dickenson article:

> Faculty. . .use the selection process to add to the library not owkrs that they required for their own personal/professional libraries, but that might have some tangental use for their research or that of their students.[28]

The second and largest obstacle is that faculty are not rewarded promotion and tenure for service to the university in helping with collection development. This is why faculty liasons must be gifted organizers in soliciting regular faculty help now. Large political battles and professional prejudices must be fought before faculty would be effectively involved in the selecting process. This is an almost insurmountable problem,

and without promotion and tenure attached, no substantial faculty involvment will occur.

One further problem is the organization and processing of faculty requests if such a system were to be implemented. Some regular channels must be organized. This again presents budgetary and administrative problems. One can easily forsee requests falling far short of budgets one year, and grossly ov errunning them the next, because of the difficulty in organizing faculty buying.

Finally there is the problem of research fashions and faculty mobility. Substantial investments may be made in certain collections (demanded by faculty) only to find that funding, new discoveries, or job switching has left the collection largely unused or useless. The total problem may be, as Charles Osburn states, that faculty are, and should be, "strong individuals, unaccustomed to understanding and working for an ill-defined common goal."[29] Thus they are, in the social and political environment of the university, unrewarded for library service, unaccountable for the selections, perhaps even uninformed of the institution-wide goals and needs, and ill-equipped to develop a long-term in depth collection. The development of a research collection means far too many things beyond buying heavily in isolated areas. It means sifting through much information and much available material in order to arrive at sound judgements for the collection as a whole, and faculty selection cannot accomplish this.

The conclusion of this paper is that the library should control collection development. Given the scope of service that a library must deal with, and the amount of information, both

current and retrospective, that should be considered, library control is the only practical way of insuring adequate development of research collections. The interdisciplinary nature of much research and the relationship of one subject area's collection to another are also both vital considerations that only library control could adequately address. The new areas of networks and cooperative collection development are again the best controlled throughout the library. This os course only works with effective faculty cooperation. Alfred Garven Engstrom cites a special case of success through cooperation at a research institution and its library.[30] But the point of this paper was not to arrive at the conclusion of library/faculty synthesis in collection development. This has been asserted many times before, and I feel it is the best solution for the faculty to have effective input into library controlled development. The point is to offer some perspective on the persistent problems that have arisen from the response to the historical problems with collection development in research libraries. The first of these is that library directors and administrators should be in the forefront of the push to make service to the university library and collectin development a larger factor in faculty promotion and tenure. As long as it is a minor consideration, faculty will address other demands first for their career advancement. Until the faculty are given effective input, there will always be a blind alley aspect to purchasing for a research collection. Only when the faculty requests are a larger part of the selection process will library control really be able to better flesh out collections in current areas

of concern, and provide new and supplementary materials for future research.

The second suggestion is that the leadership of the university needs to be sought out, and ascertained where growth is sought and or anticipated. Faculty are not the sole instigators of research. This is an area not yet fully explored.

Third, a complete and thorough collection development policy should be formulated. This also is not a new idea, but it deserves to be stated again. It is the most important single element (aside from personnel) in directing collection development. Depending on the institution, most aspects discussed should be explored and used to develop the policy. This will be a long and large task, but it will be a lasting contribution and a useful guide for library buying as a whole. It would need only periodical updating in certain areas to keep it current for many years.

Finally, one might have noticed that certain words recurred during this paper: "opinion", "judgements", and "subjective", etc. There have been attempts to rationalize and objectify collection development and the information that is used to develop a policy, but at each step of the way a judgement must be made. The choice of evaluation tools is subjective. Weighing time and budget considerations is subjective. Developing good relations with faculty and administration is a talent. Weighing research needs against current holdings is opinion. Research collections are also resources to be mined; there is no way to be comprehensive in all areas, so a philosophy must be worked out as to how much one's purchasing will reflect this, and in

which areas. In this age of selection, the ultimate choice of buying or not buying a book or periodical is the ultimate subjective choice. All attempts to the contrary, collection development is and always will be an art when it is done well. The library profession should then look to excellence in selecting and training its students, and in particular look for excellence in those materials it chooses to buy for its libraries. In future budgetary problems are not likely to ease, and more discre tion in buying will be required. The profession must rely on the talents of its members, and those members should be well-trained. The interests of future libraries rest with the library schools today.

The background of collection development in research libraries has both problems, and methods to address them. It is hopeful that some of the perspectives offered by this paper are useful, and it is further hoped that the library profession will look to the future as well as the present needs, and address some of the problems and solutions presented.

Footnotes

1. Elaine Sloan, The Organization of Collection Development in Large University Research Libraries (Ann Arbor, Mich,: University Microfilms, 1973.) p.8.

2. Charles B. Osburn, Academic Research and Library Resources: Changing Patterns in America (Westport, Conn,:Greenwood Press, 1979.) p. 106.

3. Ibid., pp. xvi-xvii.

4. Ibid., pp. xvii-xviii.

5. Ibid., p. 107.

6. Ibid., p. 95.

7. Sloan, p.6.

8. Osburn, pp. 114-115.

9. Ibid., pp. 115 & 118.

10. C. Freeman Sleeper, "Research and the College Collection: A Dean's Perspective," in Library Resources for College Scholars, ed. Robert E. Danford (Lexington, Virg,: Washington and Lee, 1980.) pp. 33-34.

11. Paul H. Mosher, "Collection Evaluation in Research Libraries: The Search for Quality, Consistency, and System in Collection Development," Library Resources and Technical Services, 23, No. 1, (Winter, 1979) p. 17.

12. Marion L. Buzzard, "Writing a Collection Development Policy for an Academic Library", Collection Management, 2(4), (Winter, 1978) p. 319.

13. Ibid., pp. 322-325.

14. Ibid., p. 324.

15. Mosher, pp. 24-29.

16. Ibid., p. 17.

17. Allen Kent, Use of Library Materials: The University of Pittsburg Study (New York: Dekker, 1979.)

18. W. Leslie Peat, "The Use of Research Libraries: A Comment About the Pittsburg Study and its Critics", Journal of Academic Librarianship, 7, No. 4 (Sept. 1981) p. 229.

19. Ibid., pp. 230-231.

20. Ibid., p.231.

21. Dennis W. Dickinson, "A Rationalist's Critique of Book Selection for Academic Libraries", Journal of Academic Librarianship, 7, No. 3 (July 1981), p. 139.

22. Ibid., p. 138.

23. Louis R. Wilson and Maurice Tauber, The University Library: The Organization, Administration, and Functions of Academic Libraries (New York,: Columbia University Press, 1956), p. 350.

24. Ibid., p. 351.

25. Dickinson, p. 140.

26. Ibid., pp 141-142.

27. Ibid., p. 140.

28. David H. Stam, "A Modest Case Against Faculty Selection", Journal of Academic Leadership, 7, No.3 (July, 1981), p. 149.

29. Charles B. Osburn, "Collection Development Needs Professional Management," Journal of Academic Librarianship,7, No. 3. (July, 1981), p. 151.

30. Alfred G. Engstrom, "Methods of Fruitful Collaboration," Journal of Academic Librarianship,7, No. 3. (July, 1981), p. 150-151.

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